

# Clamming

Duxbury Clipper

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## Red Tide Puts Shellfish Harvesting on Hold

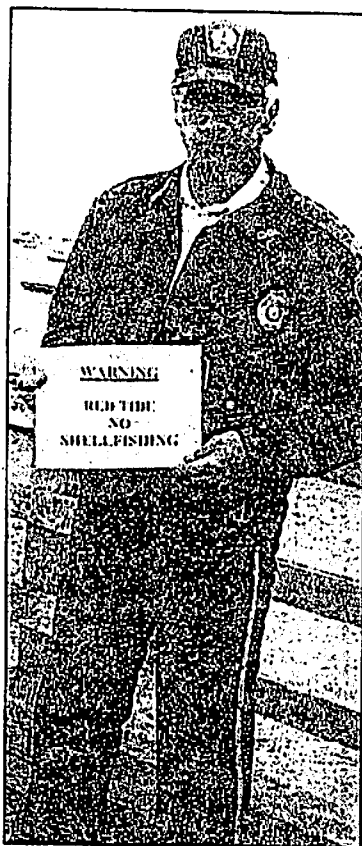
By LAUREN GRILLI

Toxic algae in the water called red tide was detected by the state Division of Marine Fisheries on Friday morning, prompting the closure of shellfish beds from Maine to Cape Cod, including Duxbury.

The red tide is a natural occurrence that is caused by environmental conditions such as warm surface temperatures, calm seas, persistent rain and northeasterly winds. When these conditions are present, the toxic algae move to the surface of the water in a "bloom," contaminating shellfish and often turning the water a reddish color.

Filter feeding shellfish such as oysters and soft-shell clams become contaminated when they ingest the toxic algae along with their food. Eating contaminated shellfish can be harmful to humans, but the Division of Marine Fisheries is making sure that contaminated shellfish are not being harvested.

Harbormaster Don Beers and his crew have been putting up neon yellow signs around the beach, bay, and areas like Shipyard Lane, warning both commercial and private shellfishermen to stop their digging, as ordered by



Harbormaster Don Beers holds one of the signs being posted around town warning shellfishermen of red tide.

The first batch of shellfish samples from Duxbury went to the lab late Sunday night for testing. Two more batches will be tested within the coming week to determine if shellfish harvesting in Duxbury can resume.

"All of this is more precautionary than reactionary. [We] don't fool around with public health issues," said Beers, who has put an extra person on each shift as a precaution.

While the red tide bloom has given the harbormaster's office extra work, it has done the opposite for local shellfish

farmers.

The bloom has halted the shellfish industry completely, from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast and Canada, anywhere to which shellfish are exported, according to Bill Bennett of Island Creek Oysters. The shellfish from Island Creek Oysters, like many of the shellfish harvested commercially in Duxbury, are usually shipped nationwide. Consumers may see a rise in shellfish prices, depending on how long the red tide lasts. With their unexpected free time, Bennett and other shellfish farmers are raising new seed and preparing for their toughest and most demanding season.

"I really don't think we have [red tide] now; but we can't take a chance," Bennett said. "We're not losing an awful lot of money, only a week or two's pay. It isn't like we're losing the product."

Duxbury oyster farmer George Shamma agrees.

"This is a setback because of the time of year. It's the beginning of field season," he said. "But the crop will not be destroyed because oysters naturally purify themselves. Right now we're using this time repairing cages and getting things ship-shape."

The threat of larger monetary losses looms for Duxbury businesses if the red tide lasts for more than four weeks, according to Shamma. How long the red tide lasts, however, is reliant on Mother Nature.

"What we need is a good, rippin' Southwest wind [to blow this out]," said Christian Horne of Island Creek Oysters.

Shamma said he believes that global warming is affecting the weather, and thus contributing to the bloom. He says he hopes that the expected Nor'easter this week will push it out to sea.

The shellfish currently on the market are not contaminated, so "there is no reason to have any fear," Shamma said.

The main shellfish products that can be contaminated by the toxin are mussels, soft shell clams, quahogs, and oysters, concentrate the toxin in their system where it remains for as long as the red tide remains in the water. Lobsters, crabs, shrimp and fish are not subject to contamination because they are not filter feeders.

When humans eat the contaminated shellfish they develop Paralytic Shellfish Poison, or PSP. According to the Division of Marine Fisheries, symptoms of PSP include a feeling of numbness in the mouth, stiffness in limbs, difficulty breathing and a rapid pulse.

Red tide is not harmful to swimmers or beach goers, according to Beers. If the sun does decide to shine sometime soon, should feel welcome to splash in the water or soak up the rays.